



## Preparing Children for \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ *When Their Parents are Deployed*

Raising children has always been a difficult task. For families who are in the military, additional challenges exist. Military families are constantly on the move and have to continuously adjust to new surroundings, housing arrangements, and friends. Children in military families are faced with the challenge of switching schools, making new friends, and leaving old friends behind.

Yet the hardest thing that military children must deal with is the deployment of their parents. Deployment to a location away from home results in a separation between service members and their loved ones. Having to tell a child that his or her parent is going away can be difficult. Adults should stress to children that:

- **They did nothing wrong.**  
Children may think that their parent is leaving because of something that they did or did not do. It is important for children to understand that this is far from the truth. Children need to know that this is their parent's job. Firefighters fight fires and the military defends our country.
- **They are not alone.**  
Assist children in finding a support group with other children who have parents deployed in the military. It may be helpful to children to know that others are experiencing what they are going through.
- **Their parent did not abandon them.**  
It's important that children know that their parent did not just leave. Statements such as "your parent is on assignment" or "your parent is on the job or at work" are helpful to communicate to children that their parent did not desert them. Continuous communication is also vital to allay fears regarding abandonment.

When a parent is deployed, it can be a stressful experience for children. It is important to maintain routine schedules and balance in children's everyday lives. Below are some tips to help children deal with the fact that their parent is away.

- **Get a calendar to note the days their parent will be gone.**  
Be sure to inform children when their parent is coming back. If the parent's return will be delayed, tell the children as soon as you know.
- **Get a map to show children where their parent is.**  
Do this even if their parent is close by. You can use different color flags to demonstrate where their parent has been and where he or she is now.

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- **If possible, show children where their parent will be staying.**  
If children can see where their parents will be sleeping, eating, and showering, it may ease their minds. Children may be very concerned thinking about how their parents go about their daily routines
- **Remember to take time for yourself.**  
While children are in daycare, school, or visiting other relatives and friends, use the time wisely. Get some rest, read a book or enjoy a long, warm bath. A stressed out parent at home doesn't do children any good while their other parent is away.

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healthy bodies  
sound minds  
a safe place to work

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